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THE ALDINE.

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JAMES SUTTON, President.

NEW YORK, JANUARY, 1875.

SONGS OF THE MONTHS.

JANUARY: Cares of the past to the wild breezes fling!
Joyous the song that the New Year bells sing;
Courage and patience, the gifts that they bring.

FEBRUARY: Far in the Southland, the birds are debating
Speedy returning to cottage and hall:
Under the snow-drifts the blossoms are waiting—
Waiting, impatient, the Spring-maiden's call.

MARCH: Under the edge of the rock-rift,
Daintiest forms are seen,
Close by the winter's snow-drift,—
Hints of the summer's green.

APRIL: Brooks are laughing down the valleys;
Breezes murmur soft and clear;
Tell-tale birds have brought the tidings:
"Lo! the joyous spring is here."

MAY: Oh, the merry month of May!
The world is keeping holiday!
And the earth and the sky are so royally giving,
That life is complete in mere pleasure of living.

JUNE: Beautiful June!—
Nature's loveliest boon!
The earth and the air are in perfect attune,
Singing to welcome thee, beautiful June.

JULY: Banish care and fear,
And all things drear,
In the golden noontide of the year.
Floating along
On the dancing waves with laugh and song.

AUGUST: O joyous month
Whose cradle song
Is the reaper's chime,
The vales along.
A queenly queen has the year become,
Crowned with wreaths of the "Harvest Home."

SEPTEMBER: In livery golden, the birches wait,
Heralding autumn in regal state.
The sumachs, in robings of crimson, flash
By the clustered globes of the mountain ash.

OCTOBER: Heap high the board
With the autumn cheer,
The garnered hoard
Of the perfect year.
Mellowed and ripened in rarest shape
Are the pulpy sweets of the pear and grape.

NOVEMBER: White surf breaking
Along the strand;
Wild winds sweeping
O'er sea and land.

DECEMBER: Tired and aged, quite,
The year is at rest,
A robe of white
Soft folded across its peaceful breast.
Gayly the Christmas bells are ringing:
Anthems of joy the world is singing.

—Alice M. Guernsey.

CHRISTMAS IN LONDON.

THREE or four years ago, it became my duty to spend a whole winter in London, in pursuance of certain business which would persist in not allowing itself to be carried across the Atlantic; and necessarily during that winter, while suffering some of the discomforts which an American is sure to experience on an extended sojourn anywhere else than at home, I enjoyed many privileges and made many acquaintances from which those of my countrymen are debarred who only pass through London on their way to or from the continent, or who hurriedly and in a few days of summer "do" the great metropolis, with every hour overfilled and a thousand objects crowding together in the mind and making it little else than a chaos. During the comparative leisure of that winter, I came to know the resources of the mightiest city on earth, its theatres, opera-houses, picture-galleries, museums, law-courts, and other details of an enlarged civilization, with a particularity which any stranger might consider tolerably thorough, however much I inevitably fell short of the local knowledge possessed by a resident of many years or a lifetime.

Of course, among other privileges, I caught a glimpse of London Christmas, even if only a glimpse, and not to be compared with that fine old English Christmas in the country, with which many American readers have been made pleasantly familiar by Irving, in his charming "Bracebridge Hall." It is not to many men that the feudal mansions of England are thrown open, as they were to *him*; and who could describe them as he did, even if they were? Some recollection of this, I think, combined with the cold, which made extended traveling at that season undesirable, to make me neglect two invitations actually within my reach—one to a noble old mansion in the Midlands, where I might have sat under the waxen blaze, reflected from the carved and polished black oak of many centuries, with historical associations all around me and historical names every moment meeting my ear,—and another to a quiet family gathering, away down on the south coast, where I might have come much nearer to the warmth of the genuine English heart in hospitality, and grown much better to understand the mysteries of the festival time in the country. Ah, well—perhaps I should have accepted one or the other of those rare chances; but I did not, and so there is an end of it. In the place of doing so, I saw Christmas in London, after a certain sort; and, failing the best that might have been, let us find the best that we can in the alternative.

I remained in London, where the season was dismal enough, even if interesting, as the most intense cold known in the metropolis for thirty years, set in a few days before the anniversary, freezing up the street-hydrants for a good three weeks, making the streets alternately snowy and slippery, with other alternations of cold and dripping fog; crippling the omnibuses; giving the cabs excuse for double prices; and affording the strongest illustration of the impossibility of keeping apartments warm, in American weather, with the miserable high-placed little grates that are considered quite effective enough for an ordinary London winter. What would I not have given at times for an American stove (unhealthy as that undoubtedly is), a base-burner, or a Franklin, with a bushel or two of good peach-orchard or Lackawanna, to put in the place of that flaming but deceptive cannell, and show all Great Britain what it was to be once *thoroughly warmed through*! Thank all the fates that I did not so entirely "freeze-up," or "freeze-out," as to destroy all powers of observation!—that I was even able to extract a certain amount of enjoyment as well as information from the time and its surroundings!

In some regards, Christmas is very differently kept in London, from the habit in any of the great American cities. As with us, it is a season for family reunions—for "going home," if there is any home to go to. Half London goes away, the day before Christmas, if not earlier, to some home-spot in the country; and I suppose that one-third of the country comes up to London, at a corresponding time, for a similar purpose. As with us, it is made the occasion of many gifts and presents, but all open ones, under the general name of the "Christmas-box" (the name no doubt derived from some class who went around with a box for donations, two or three or five hundred years ago), as there is no beautiful fiction of Santa Claus (for which we of America are indebted to the Dutch), and no little stockings are hung up on Christmas Eve in the chimney corner, except among the few who may have imported the custom, at second-hand, from America. The Christmas-tree has been brought over and acclimated, from Germany; but even that does not flourish so luxuriantly as upon western soil, though apparently every year adds to its popularity among those who have means and inclination for present-making. Notably among those who expect to receive "Christmas-boxes," are the servants and the tradespeople, as well as the very lowest class of caterers to the wants of families; and some of the applications of the latter are odd enough to demand a moment of special attention.

I had that amount of curiosity necessary for the preservation, at the Christmas under notice, of a few of the circulars handed into the house in Bloomsbury at which I temporarily made my residence—those of the dustmen and the milkmen who served the locality. These were printed on paper or cardboard, in borders, and bearing the royal arms at top; and two of them read as follows:

"To the Worthy Inhabitants of St. Giles-in-the-Fields and St. George's, Bloomsbury. Ladies and Gentlemen: We, your constant dustmen, in the employ of Mr. John Easton, contractor, make

humble application to you for a Christmas-box, which you are usually so kind as to give. And to prevent fraud on you and imposition on ourselves, which is often practiced by men dressed as dustmen, saying they are employed by the contractor above named, we hope you will not give your bounty to any but those who produce a medallion of the Saviour and Virgin. Your humble servants, Fdk. Hines, Geo. Field, and C. Chambers. N. B.—No connection with the scavengers."

"We, the regular watermen employed by Mr. John Easton, contractor, make humble application for a Christmas-box, which you are usually so kind as to give."

The third of these characteristic epistles, handed in by a cow-keeper in the neighborhood, has unfortunately disappeared, with all its wealth of verbal and pictorial illustration, blending sacred history and profane mendicancy, the manger of Bethlehem and the cow-sheds of St. Giles, in a manner more ingenious than appropriate. I may say, *en passant*, that whatever the harvest reaped on that occasion by the cow-keeper and the watermen, I trust that the dustmen were slighted to the point of driving them out of the parish; for never, since the "Wo!" was cried from the walls of Jerusalem, has such a wailing moan, blended with a howl, come up to the ears of men from human throats, as that which had day by day saluted my tortured ears from those same dustmen, ringing all the changes of agony on the words of notification to the scullery-maids of Bloomsbury: "Dust ho!—bring out your dust!"

Everybody, too, buys a little something for the Christmas occasion, a shade better than usual—everybody below a certain class, that is to say. And I know of no more sadly instructive experience than to do as Thomas De Quincey, the English opium-eater, habitually did, more than half a century ago—go out into the poorer parts of the great city, say into Soho, or down Drury Lane and the streets running off from it, or even deeper into that portion of St. Giles stretching away toward the Seven Dials, or below Lincoln's Inn Fields to the Clare Market neighborhood—there or in similar places to stand by the doors of some of the miserable shops, and see how the very poor buy for a holiday! To see not only how they buy, but what they buy, as to quality and quantity; how they long, and covet, and struggle, and hesitate; how close is the calculation over a coin that would slip through the fingers of a native American of even the same class and the same poverty, without his thinking twice of it. God help those swarming, half-starving poor of London!—and even more, God help him who can look upon their wants and their longings, without wishing to be monarch or millionaire and sweep all that one section of wretchedness away at one compelling word!

As a part of the proprieties of the time, of course Christmas dinners are London features, as they are features everywhere. And I am sure, by the way, that these, and all the more genial Christmas observances (I do not speak now of the religious ones), are much more general than they ever were at any earlier period, and much more general than they ever would have been, but for the life and labors of that "Apostle of Christmas" who gave us the "Christmas Carol," the "Cricket on the Hearth," the "Holly-Tree Inn," the "Seven Poor Travelers," "What Christmas is as we Grow Older," and so many others with the same bias and influence that even their names and number escape the memory. Whatever he may have been in other regards, and whatever the scope of his teachings, he certainly so shamed, thrilled, laughed, and plead his way, in behalf of the claims of the Christmas Time to benevolence and forgiveness,—that there must be infinitely more of Christmas reunions and reconciliations—more presents to the poor—more remembrances of distant relatives and duties paid to near ones—more privileges accorded to those in employ, and more general and heartfelt enjoyment of the season, than there could have been without his influence, in this day which tends to put away everything romantic and scoff at everything sentimental. Thackeray prophesied that this would be the case, at the first publication of the "Christmas Carol;" and yet probably not even he guessed at the completeness of the coming fulfillment.

But to return to the Christmas Dinner, with which these reflections have only a mild connection. Turkeys, geese, and fowls are central figures of this festival meal, in England as in America, though the turkeys are not so universal, the geese are more nearly so, and the "roast beef of Old England" (not quite so good as the American, on the average, in spite of the tradition to the contrary—while the mutton and the hams are much better than ours)—